

REPORT OF THE ICH NGO FORUM

A. Overview of the ICH NGO Forum's mission, activities and organizational development

The ICH NGO Forum is grateful for the support of the Committee, states parties and the Secretariat for more extensive NGO involvement with the Convention. NGOs are deeply involved in safeguarding, closely collaborating with communities and groups. They bring to the Convention extensive safeguarding experience and expertise. This report provides an overview of the history of the Forum, describes its current activities and roles within the Convention, and indicates recent organizational development and governance initiatives.

The establishment of the ICHNGO Forum occurred during the first cycle of accreditation of NGOs to the 2003 Convention, in 2009–2010. Since then it has become over time the principal platform for communication, networking, exchange and cooperation among accredited NGOs safeguarding ICH on a national, regional and international scale. It also welcomes NGOs of varying capacities that are in the process of accreditation. The Forum strongly advocates for the central role of ICH bearing communities, groups and individuals along with the contribution to the Convention of NGOs devoted to safeguarding ICH. NGOs act in the interest of civil society, working independently yet collaboratively with governments, the two governing organs of the Convention, the UNESCO Secretariat, and other stakeholders on national and international levels, in accordance with the principles and objectives of the Convention.

From the Forum's earliest days, the common areas of interests and experiences of its member organizations generated the establishment of working groups. Currently they include groups concerned with alternate, lighter ways of sharing safeguarding experiences; gender and intellectual property; global results framework; ethics; research; and information and technology communication. The Forum also now includes regional working groups to share experiences and find ways to develop network cooperation, relationships and capacity building in each of the six regions of the world.

During the past five years the ICH NGO Forum created new organizational structures and constituting documents. Cooperation and coordination among member organizations was greatly enhanced by the creation of the first Steering Committee of the Forum in 2015, with electoral procedures instituted in 2018. The Steering Committee is responsible for implementing policies decided by the General Assembly of the Forum and manages its operations, finances, administration, and related affairs. Throughout the year, it oversees communication around activities of its member organizations, and coordinates the Forum's major ongoing activities and planning for the next period. In order to accomplish its tasks, the Steering Committee meets online on a monthly basis (minutes are publicly available at <http://www.ichngoforum.org/steering-committee/>). Its members serve in a volunteer, unpaid capacity. There are several stipulations in the Bylaws to prevent conflicts of interest, while the Code of Conduct contains provisions pertaining to the Forum's general principles, integrity and public trust, financial matters, fundraising, partnerships and collaborations. Both constituting documents were adopted in 2019.

The coordinating role of the Steering Committee pertains in particular to meetings (regular symposia and occasional capacity-building workshops) on shared approaches and challenges relating to ICH safeguarding policies and practices. These convenings take place concurrently with the sessions of COM and GA, as well as at such other meetings as the Consultation meeting on the role of accredited NGOs within the 2003 Convention, convened in April 2019 by the Secretariat of the Convention. The Forum prioritizes participatory engagement by its members to the greatest extent possible, with the planning, elaboration and implementation of programmes incorporating invitations to all accredited NGOs to actively participate. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several online meetings open to all ICH NGOs were organized to compensate for the lack of face to face meetings. We shall continue to emphasize our participatory principle. It will be enhanced through capacity-building tailored specifically for NGOs as a whole and for specific

groups, to achieve the highest possible engagement of as many ICH NGOs as possible, with all benefitting as much as possible from their various capacities, perspectives and expertise.

The Steering Committee also manages the online ICH NGO Forum Newsletter, which includes current information, notices, invitations, and frequent features on selected topics. Since 2014, 19 issues have been published, including three in 2020. The first issue in 2020 includes a special focus on the outcomes of the Forum's activities attached to 14.COM. The second issue deals with the impact of COVID-19 on ICH and also includes analysis and possible solutions to the problem of geographical imbalance among accredited NGOs. The third issue includes the preparation of the Forum's programme attached to 15.COM, including this report.

In 2012, the Forum started its online journal #HeritageAlive. With an editorial board composed of members from all over the world, and Eivind Falk serving as editor in chief, it emphasizes features describing and discussing safeguarding experiences from the field. It has included articles on safeguarding traditional crafts, festivals and naming practices as well as volumes realized in cooperation with ICHCAP: on *Traditional Medicine* (2017) and *Traditional Food* (2019).

B. Programmes and initiatives for 2019–2020

During the past year the Forum expanded its programming and initiatives. These activities have been engaging a wide range of Convention stakeholders, both at the Forum's meetings in Bogotá and throughout the year. They illustrate the variety of ways that the Forum contributes to the Convention as well as potential contributions moving forward. These activities entail collaborations with multiple partners, including states parties and, following from a plan of activities adopted in Bogotá, Category 2 centres. As we were preparing this report plans were underway for an online symposium on ICH and resilience in crises, co-organized with the ICHCAP on 12–13 November 2020.

Symposium on ICH in urban contexts, and the resulting publication

A symposium on the Saturday before the Committee's session explored ICH in diverse urban settings carried out by government and through community initiatives. The presentations demonstrated how ICH builds social cohesion and can bring about new dialogue among communities. Speakers presented case studies of ICH in Kathmandu, Kolkata, Singapore, Colombia, Dhaka, Barnako, and migrant communities in Paris and Arnhem. The proceedings were published online in September 2020 (<http://www.ichngoforum.org/ich-urban-contexts-soft-publication-now-available/>). They included sections on urban policies, realities, experiences and migrants. The symposium and publication can contribute to the Committee's deliberations on ICH in urban contexts. They were made possible through a successful partnership with the National Heritage Board of Singapore, which took an active part in the programme, and provided generous support, pointing the way to future collaborations with heritage agencies of states parties.

Reflections and recommendations concerning the reform of the listing mechanisms

The Forum closely follows and examines topics on the agenda of COM and GA sessions. During its annual meeting in 2019 in Bogotá the Forum thoroughly discussed the ongoing process of global reflection on the listing mechanisms, taking also into account a parallel process of reflection on the advisory functions of accredited NGOs. Our discussions were highly participatory, embodying the broad range of expertise of our members through contributions by everybody at the meeting facilitated through a metaplan methodology. The outcomes of the deliberations were presented in our intervention 14.COM 14, and through further reflection in the intervention 8.GA 11. While the complete document is available on our website (http://www.ichngoforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Reform-of-the-listing-mechanism_short-report_ICH-NGO-Forum.pdf (English); <http://www.ichngoforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Point-11.pdf> (French)).

While there is currently no mechanism for the Forum's recommendations to be considered by the Committee in its deliberations and decisions, we include a suggestion below to address this issue.

ICH NGO Forum Bylaws, and Code of Conduct

Constituting documents for organizational governance and ethical practice are a sine qua non of any organization or association. Following intensive discussions among our memberships we adopted Bylaws and Code of Conduct at the Forum's General Meeting in 2019. The instruments codify the ethical standards for members of the Forum; composition, election and duties of its Steering Committee and the role of the working groups along with other bodies. These documents provide a chartering framework for cooperation, coordination and sustainability in the affairs of the Forum. They address long-standing issues concerning the role of NGOs in the 2003 Convention.

ICH in emergencies and COVID-19

Faced with the global pandemic and accompanying lockdown, the Forum engaged in online consultations about ICH and COVID, leading to an online session in August 2020 which resulted in agreement about the following observation: (1) It is widely accepted that ICH in emergencies – whether by natural disaster or armed conflict - can play a dual role – both to mitigate threats to ICH itself and to serve as a powerful tool to help communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies (cf. 14.COM 13). ICH maintained and created during the COVID pandemic has the same functions. (2) Exchange of information, especially sharing of good practices, is of special importance when one needs to act speedily against the threat of the pandemic. (3) Many communities, groups and individuals are coping with the pandemic by relying on, (re)turning to, or looking for resources and means in their immediate social, cultural and natural environment, demonstrating a self-sufficiency associated with living heritage, embodying UN sustainable development goals (4) Many ICH communities adapted to the pandemic by developing online methods of practicing, enacting, transmitting and safeguarding ICH. In principle, such methods represent a substitute for face-to-face interaction as a basis of ICH. ICH bearers are rapidly acquiring skills with online media that will benefit them post-pandemic in reaching wider audiences and transmitting ICH over large distances. The limitations of online media include loss of affect, lack of a live audience and limited monetization of performances. (5) The highest percentage (c. 40%) of responses to UNESCO's call to share experiences in the context of COVID-19 pandemic was provided by ICH NGOs. This response rate demonstrates an increasingly robust presence of NGOs with the Convention

C. Role of accredited NGOs and the ICH NGO Forum within the Convention – Issues, challenges and new directions

The role of accredited NGOs within the 2003 Convention is a topic of ongoing discussion. This discussion has intensified since 12.COM, when the Committee "invite[d] the Secretariat and the informal ad hoc working group to reflect, in consultation with accredited NGOs, on the possible ways in which the participation of NGOs under the 2003 Convention could be further enhanced and how this would be reflected in the accreditation and renewal mechanisms of NGOs" (12.COM 17). Following are responses to the main issues raised in the course of this ongoing reflection process (cf. 13.COM 13, 13.COM 16, 14.COM 15, 8.GA 12).

Identifying existing and new *inter alia* functions

As it is well known, a subchapter of the Operational Directives dedicated to the role of NGOs in the implementation of the Convention (III.2) relies on an *inter alia* frame of reference. On a national level, NGOs are *inter alia* involved in inventorying and defining ICH along with engaging in appropriate safeguarding measures (OD 90), while on the international level they may be invited by the Committee to provide it, *inter alia*, with reports of evaluation of submissions for the four mechanisms of the Convention (OD 96).

The members of the Forum engaged in extensive discussion to identify other *inter alia* advisory functions that accredited NGO could and do play in the implementation of the Convention, and which thus ought to be included in the Operational Directives. They are summarized as follows in

the Forum's Bylaws: (a) serving as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas about safeguarding ICH; (b) acting as a platform for networking and cooperation among ICH NGOs; (c) fostering ethical principles and participation of civil society for the safeguarding of ICH; (d) providing resources, reports and information about safeguarding practices to UNESCO, States Parties, communities, practitioners and other ICH stakeholders; (e) supporting ICH NGOs in advancing their cooperation with governmental and intergovernmental entities (such as National Commissions for UNESCO, regional offices of UNESCO and Category 2 centers), especially as regards implementation of the principles of community agency and community-based, participatory, bottom-up approaches; (f) contributing to the capacity-building programme and to experience-sharing on good safeguarding practices, including through the publication of the journal #HeritageAlive; (g) advising the Intergovernmental Committee on specific thematic issues, and participating in reporting on and monitoring inscribed ICH elements and safeguarding practices. The explicit advisory functions to the Committee could incorporate not only the current service in the Evaluation Body, but also advising on these specific thematic issues, encompassing experience-sharing on good safeguarding practices, and participation in follow-up (reporting and monitoring) on inscribed elements.

Accreditation and review of accreditation

The criteria for accreditation and for review of accreditations warrant reevaluation. Current accreditation criteria do not address competencies and capacities necessary for service in the Evaluation Body. On the other hand, review criteria are rather opaque and/or too formal for many NGOs involved in safeguarding ICH on a national level. More importantly, however, differentiating between NGOs active on national levels versus NGOs in service to the Committee does not allow for the complexity of the entirety of NGOs engaged with ICH. The "disparity in size and capacities of accredited NGOs" (cf. LHE-19-14.COM-15, para. 9) is a direct and necessary reality in response to the variety and diversity of communities, groups and individuals that we serve. The multiple grounds of difference between us actually represent our strength. Among the varieties of NGOs are those that can be identified primarily as brokers and/or facilitators connecting ICH communities, governmental entities and other stakeholders; others see expertise as their key term; yet others are dedicated to one or another (sub-)domain of ICH, or to specific safeguarding measures; the ICH communities and groups also organize themselves into NGOs.

Mapping domains of competence of NGOs, as requested of the Secretariat by Decision 14.COM, para. 6, will be surely helpful in detecting "untapped potential" (cf. Decisions 14.COM 15, para. 5; 8.GA 12, para. 5) of NGOs. Through this mapping it should be possible to reconcile the two sets of criteria for the purpose of improving the advisory role of NGOs to the Committee and to States Parties. In parallel, this objective may and should be attained by improving partnership, cooperation and coordination with accredited NGOs and its Forum.

While there is great diversity among accredited NGOs, we are all united in our desire to be recognized as NGOs accredited by the Committee and the General Assembly. This recognition is essential to connect us to UNESCO, providing validation and enhancing reputation, which can be productively utilized in various contexts, ranging from the hyperlocal to direct services to the Committee. Many of our members feel that the Committee and the Assembly should be responsible for accreditation rather than vesting this responsibility in the Forum, as suggested as a possibility by the Secretariat at the Consultation meeting last year. It might be worthwhile to explore, however, a hybrid approach which would consist of a peer review process involving the Forum followed by accreditation by the IGC and GA, which could further the integration of the Forums' work with the Convention.

Accreditation of NGOs from non-States Parties to the Convention

NGOs from non-States Parties to the Convention are of indispensable importance to the global network of ICH NGOs associated with UNESCO, as they are for other UN entities. ICH is universalized through accreditation of NGOs from such countries, which contain a combined population of well over 550 million, including two of the ten most populous countries, Accredited

NGOs from non-States Parties are best positioned to advocate for their governments to join the Convention, while remaining autonomous. One should also bear in mind that a part of accredited NGOs from such countries are actually international NGOs. For all these reasons, the Forum supports continued accreditation of NGOs from non-States Parties to the Convention.

Capacity-building and assistance to accredited NGOs

One cannot deny that a significant number of accredited NGOs, once they are accredited, do not contribute further to the sessions of the Committee and the accompanying activities of the Forum. One of the main reasons is unfamiliarity with know-how, language and protocols of these bodies. At its annual meetings, the Forum regularly offers workshop sessions tailored for newcomers, and in general nurtures inclusiveness, diversity and dialogue. Following the accreditation of 36 new NGOs at the 8.GA, a welcome letter was sent to inform them about the roles and functioning of the Forum, encouraging them to take an active part in our activities (using either English or French). These actions should be accompanied by a deepening of our collaboration with the capacity-building unit of the Secretariat in order to increase the share of accredited NGOs in the global capacity-building programme, as well as the development of relevant material intended specifically for NGOs. Both these undertakings would also help to overcome unbalanced geographical distribution of accredited NGOs, and are completely in line with Decision 14.COM 15, para. 7.

The Forum's meetings attached to GA and especially to COM are of great benefit to the work of NGOs, their own capacity development, and therefrom to their overall contribution to the functioning of the Convention. We are grateful for resources provided from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund to support the participation of NGOs from developing countries at the statutory sessions. In this regard, we recommend for the assistance to be extended to participation of such NGOs in the Forum's activities prior to the beginning of COM sessions, which in 2019 commenced two days in advance, as well as to a support for English and French interpretation service in order to remain the most inclusive and fair possible in our discussions. In addition, taking into account the key coordinating role of the Steering Committee, we recommend to extend the support from the Fund to its seven members, regardless of whether their NGOs are located in developing countries or not. In general, we are of the opinion that additional assistance needs to be given to NGOs to maximize their advisory functions to the Committee.

Unbalanced geographical distribution

We share the concern of the Committee and Assembly regarding unbalanced geographical distribution of accredited NGOs. Even though the imbalance is declining, some regions are still under-represented in comparison to other regions. In contrast, when it comes to the representation of different regions in the Steering Committee, all of them are equal – each takes one seat, along with one for international NGOs. The Forum itself should do more in this regard through networking, and through direct communication with NGOs from under-represented regions that are directly involved with elements inscribed in the two lists and the register, but have not applied for accreditation. We hope that a new working group dedicated to this issue, which is in the process of formation, will be instrumental in achieving more balanced geographic participation.

The status of the ICH NGO Forum within the Convention

The Forum is organized and operated as an association of NGOs accredited to the Convention. According to Art. 5 of the Bylaws, any NGO accredited to the Convention is considered a member of the ICH NGO Forum after being informed in this regard, unless it declines membership in the ICH NGO Forum. In the process following the adoption of the Bylaws in December last year, all accredited NGOs were contacted about this stipulation, and no NGO declined membership. However, since it would be preferable for membership to be confirmed in a clearly affirmative manner, we ask the Committee to request the Secretariat to add a question pertaining to NGOs membership in the Forum within the accreditation and re-accreditation forms.

Contribution to the deliberations at statutory meetings

The Forum feels frustrated by the impediments to taking a more active role in the deliberations of the GA and COM. The usual framework is that it provides a statement, a very short report and/or an intervention on a specific agenda item, followed by words of gratitude by the session chair, with rarely any feedback by the Committee or States Parties delegates. Only when it comes to agenda items dealing specifically with NGOs may we expect some degree of exchange, as for instance happened during 14.COM/15, when several Committee members commented about our intervention and posed some questions, so that we had opportunity to further explain and develop our position. Our position did have an impact on the Decision 14.COM 15 that followed, demonstrating the value of active and direct exchange.

As this Convention is specific in the context of other UNESCO Conventions for its strong bottom-up, participatory and dialogical principles, we deem it appropriate to kindly request the Committee to consider if its Rules of Procedure could be modified to allow more participatory and dialogical exchanges at its sessions.

D. Concluding note

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide this report. As it is the first of its kind in the history of the Forum, the ideas and suggestions presented above are only to a limited, modest degree reflected in the Draft decision proposed below. At the moment, we feel it is sufficient to acknowledge the importance of ICH NGOs in the functioning of the Convention, along with acknowledgement of key advisory roles that they may play, the position of the Forum as the association of accredited NGOs, and a need for collaboration between the Secretariat and the Forum on capacity-building for accredited NGOs, in particular those from under-represented regions. More concrete modalities can be developed at a later stage of this process.

The Committee may wish to adopt the following decision:

Draft decision

The Committee,

- Commends the work of the ICH NGO Forum and welcomes its report
- Acknowledges the important role of accredited NGOs in the evaluation of the four mechanisms of the Convention, in advisory on specific thematic issues, in experience-sharing on good safeguarding practices, and in participation in follow-up (reporting and monitoring) on inscribed elements
- Notes with appreciation the strengthening of the ICH NGO Forum governance, participatory principle of its operation, and its services to the bearing communities, groups and individuals, and civil society at large, in line with the principles and objectives of the Convention
- Further commends the activities of the ICH NGO Forum on an international scale that are attached to the Committee's sessions, including symposia, capacity-building and other activities
- Encourages the Secretariat to increase the share of accredited NGOs in the global capacity-building programme, and in collaboration with the ICH NGO Forum to develop material intended specifically for NGOs
- Further encourages the Secretariat and the ICH NGO Forum to devise means, in coordinated efforts with States Parties, to overcome unbalanced geographical distribution of accredited NGOs
- Requests the Secretariat to add into the accreditation and re-accreditation forms a direct question pertaining to the membership in the Forum
- Decides to include a separate item on "Report of the ICH NGO Forum" at its sixteen session